

# Epistemics of Divine Reality

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*What Knowledge Claims of God Involve*

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3. But there are only two ways things can differ: either by being (something) or by non-being (nothing).
4. However, two (or more) things cannot differ by nothing, for to differ by nothing means not to differ at all.
5. Neither can things differ by something or being, because being is the only thing that everything has in common, and things cannot differ in the very respect in which they are the same.
6. Therefore, things cannot differ at all; everything is one.<sup>250</sup>

Even if it was said that things that are differ from each other by differences of shape, composition, etc., it would still remain that they only differ superficially and not ultimately. So the differences are only superficial, that is as they appear to us. The substratum, namely being, is one and contiguous. But if being as the substratum of the universe is one, then how do the superficial differences come to be or appear to be so? Both Parmenides and Zeno answer by saying that the appearances are false but do not seem to explain how they come to appear so, as has already been seen. Attention must now, therefore, be turned to the *advaitins* of Indian philosophy.

### The *Advaitin* Search for Unity in Diversity

*Advaita* philosophy is deeply religious and epistemologically based. The chief problem is ignorance and the way to ultimate liberation is by realization of Truth. *Advaita* means non-dual and refers to the doctrine that reality is ultimately non-dual in nature and all plurality and diversity manifest in nature is only illusory. Liberation consists in the dissolution of the knower-known duality. To quote from the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad:

Because when there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. (But) when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should one know That owing to which all this is

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<sup>250</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 168

known – through what, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower?<sup>251</sup>

The doctrine of *advaita* (non-dualism) has its origin in the Upanishads though the systematization of it was eventually done by Shankaracharya (788-820 A.D.), a Brahmin from Kerala and disciple of Gaudapada whose *Karika* (expository treatise) on the Mandukya Upanishad contains the roots of *advaita siddhanta* (doctrine of non-dualism).

The Upanishads formed a portion of the Hindu Scriptures, viz. the Vedas. They were, in fact, part of the Aranyakas which were themselves a part of the Brahmana portion of the Vedas. Many of the Upanishadic doctrines originated among the Kshatriyas independent of the Brahmanas and Aranyakas which formed the sacred lore of the Brahmins.<sup>252</sup>

The word Upanishad is considered to have been derived from the root ‘sad’ meaning to sit down, and the prepositions ‘upa’ meaning near, and ‘ni’ meaning down. Thus, ‘Upanishad’ etymologically meant ‘to sit down near’ the teacher.<sup>253</sup> Some disagree to the meaning of ‘sad’ as ‘to sit down’ and think that it should rather be interpreted as ‘destruction or approaching’; thus, meaning by ‘Upanishad’ that which destroys ignorance by revelation of the Truth. It is, however, unanimously agreed upon that the Upanishads were secret teachings meant for the few who desired to know the truth.

Of the many Upanishads that exist (over 108), the Mundakya Upanishad is considered to best embody the doctrine of non-dualism. In only twelve mantras, it is thought as have packed into a nutshell all the wisdom of the Upanishads.<sup>254</sup> Together with the Gaudapada Karika and Shankara’s commentary on it, it forms a powerful argument for the inevitability of non-dual reality. In this research, the Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada’s Karika and Shankara’s commentary will be chiefly studied to find the rational epistemics inherent in their conception of reality as non-dual.

While for the Greeks physical reality was a major concern, for the Indians conscious reality was the major concern. While the Greeks tried to find

<sup>251</sup> *The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, II.iv.14 (trans. Swami Madhavananda; Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997), p. 259

<sup>252</sup> Swami Madhavananda, *Minor Upanishads* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1996), p. vi

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid*, p. viii

<sup>254</sup> Swami Krishnananda, *The Mandukya Upanishad* (Rishikesh: The Divine Life Society, 1996), p. 7

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what the unifying basis of all physical reality was as such, the Indians wanted to find what the unifying basis of all conscious reality was as such. The Greeks began from physics and proceeded on to metaphysics. The Indians began from the self, from consciousness, and proceeded on to metaphysics. The Greeks tried to analyze the known in order to understand the known. The Indian analyzed the knower in order to understand the known. Thus, the Indian quest for ultimate reality can be described as a search for a psychological basis of the universe.

This has several implications:

1. In the search for the external, one begins with the attempt to first understand the internal, viz. consciousness.
2. Before knowing what is out there, one begins with the attempt to first understand why knowing even exists.
3. If consciousness as one experiences it is false, then all quest no matter how scientific it appears will be wrong headed. But if consciousness as one experiences it is true, then the quest can end up in truth.
4. The problem is not why something exists, but why something such as consciousness exists. The knower is thus the starting point.
5. Liberation, thus, becomes noetic; knowledge of the Truth brings salvation.
6. No wonder, then, in advaita the Brahman is called Sat-chit-ananda, meaning Being-Consciousness-Bliss, with pure consciousness as the essence of being and bliss; bliss being that condition of being as consciousness in which no distraction or strife by virtue of duality exists.

The words “Brahman,” “Self,” “Reality,” “Lord,” “God,” and “Consciousness,” in the personal noun form refer to the Absolute and Ultimate Reality, Brahman. Following, then, is a brief exposition of the rational method employed in the search for reality as contained in the *Mandukya Upanishad*<sup>255</sup>, and Gaudapada’s *Karika* and Shankara’s *Commentary* on it:

1. An analysis of consciousness shows that consciousness has four states; therefore, the Self has four quarters:

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<sup>255</sup> *Mandukya Upanishad, with the Karika of Gaudapada and the Commentary of Sankaracarya* (trans. Swami Gambhirananda; Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995).

- a. *Vaisvanara*, whose sphere of activity is the waking state of external-world consciousness in which sensible objects are apprehended as real.
  - b. *Taijasa*, whose sphere of activity is the dreaming sleep state of internal-world consciousness in which dream objects are apprehended as real.
  - c. *Prajna*, whose sphere of activity is the dreamless sleep state of undifferentiated consciousness in which all being finds origin and dissolution, i.e., as doorway to the experience of the dream and waking states.
  - d. *Turiya* (Self), whose sphere of activity is the state of neither internal-world consciousness nor external-world consciousness nor undifferentiated consciousness nor unconsciousness. *Atman* is uninferable, unthinkable, and indescribable; the Self that is unchanging, auspicious, and non-dual.<sup>256</sup>
2. The fourth quarter is inferred from the first three as the only reality that answers to the first three. The fourth is not just different from the first three; it is, in fact, the only reality into which all the others merge on realization. The analogy is explained by analysis of the word *Om*.
- a. The word *Om* is made up of three letters, *a*, *u*, and *m*.
  - b. *A* refers to *Vaisvanara*, which is first and pervasive, i.e., all experience is pervaded by it.
  - c. *U* refers to *Taijasa*, which is intermediate to the waking and undifferentiated states, even as *u* is intermediate to *a* and *m*.
  - d. *M* refers to *Prajna*, the undifferentiated state of consciousness as a mass, which is absorptive: that from which the waking and dreaming quarters proceed and in which they end, even as in the pronunciation of *Om*, both *a* and *u* end in and rise from *m*.
  - e. *Om* refers to *Turiya*, the non-dual consciousness, which is neither this nor that, the culmination of phenomenal world. Thus, it is the one in which the first three states of consciousness merge at realization even as *a*, *u*, and *m* merge into *Om* on pronunciation.

Thus, the Mandukya purports to show that the *Om* is *Turiya* – beyond all conventional dealings, the limit of the negation of the phenomenal world, the auspicious, and the non-dual. *Om* is thus the Self to be sure, it says,

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<sup>256</sup> Mandukya Upanishad 7, *Ibid*, p. 34

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and he who knows thus enters the Self through the self. Thus, the waking self can realize itself as *Turiya*, the true Self. Table 1 illustrates the above.

3. Gaudapada goes on to prove how the first three states of consciousness are false and not real, while the partless *Atman* is the only reality and the substratum to all other experiences. Gaudapada's *Karika* consists of four *prakaranas* (chapters) of which the first is interspersed between the passages of the *Mandukya Upanishad*.

An outline of the four *prakaranas* is as follows:

- a. *Agama-Prakarana* - It is a discourse on the Vedic text, *viz.* the *Mandukya Upanishad*.
- b. *Vaitathya-Prakarana* - It is a rational discourse on unreality. Having ascertained the meaning of the Vedic text in the earlier chapter, it now purports to rationally demonstrate the unreality of the phenomenal world.
- c. *Advaita-Prakarana* - It is a rational discourse on non-duality. Having shown that the phenomenal cannot be real on logical grounds, it now purports to rationally establish the verity of non-duality on logical grounds.
- d. *Alatasanti-Prakarana* - It is the chapter on quenching the firebrand, in which the firebrand is used as an illustration of Consciousness in vibration giving rise to appearances. It also purports to prove as false all opposing theories and demonstrate the finality of the *advaita* doctrine as well show the way of quenching of the firebrand, i.e., liberation from duality.

The arguments are as follows:

### *Argument from Dream*

1. Objects perceived in a dream are false since they cannot be located in finite body (II.1, 2).
2. Objects perceived in the dream and the waking states, being common in the sense of both being perceived, are similar and, therefore, one (II.4, 5).
3. Therefore, objects perceived in the waking states are as false as objects perceived in the dream state.

This argument is reminiscent of the old Chinese philosopher's question: If I dreamed I was a butterfly and awoke to find myself a man, how do I know whether I was a man who dreamed I was a butterfly or was a butterfly dreaming I am a man? The above argument of Gaudapada may be reinstated in the following manner:

1. Since consciousness is one, its perception must be consistent.
2. To say that objects in dream are false but objects in the waking state are real is to say that consciousness is inconsistent in perceiving things.
3. But if consciousness is inconsistent, then truth cannot be known for certain.
4. Since the objects in dream are obviously false from the standpoint of the waking state, it must be inferred that the objects in the waking state are false from another standpoint, and so on, in order that consistency of consciousness be maintained.
5. The standpoints cannot be infinite; therefore a final condition of consciousness must exist.
6. In the final analysis, it must, for the sake of consistency, be maintained that the objects of both the dream and waking states are false.
7. Therefore, the objects of both the dream and waking states are false and phenomenal plurality as it appears is unreal.

The dream and waking states point to subjective idealism. Though the objects of the dream and waking states can be denied reality, reality cannot be denied to consciousness itself. Thus, consciousness itself is the substratum to the objects of perception. And consciousness is non-different from the experiencer as Shankara explains:

The creatures visible to a waking man are non-different from his consciousness, since they are perceived through consciousness, just like the creatures perceived by the consciousness of a dreamer. And that consciousness, again, engaged in the perception of creatures, is non-different from the experiencer, since it is perceived by the experiencer, like the consciousness in the dream state.<sup>257</sup>

Thus, Consciousness alone is the only reality and plurality of objects is super-imposed on it.

Gaudapada's dismissal of the phenomenal reality of waking state on the basis of his dismissal of the phenomenal reality of the dream state might

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<sup>257</sup> Comment on Karika IV. 65-66, *Mandukya Upanisad*, p. 209

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be unjustified extrapolation, in the sense of certainty of knowledge. For by his argument only a probability emerges: this phenomenal reality of the waking state *might probably be* as unreal from another state of consciousness as the phenomenal reality of the dream state is unreal to the waking state. But how does one know whether or not the waking state is the rock-bottom state of consciousness? On what basis is another higher state of consciousness assumed? Gaudapada doesn't give a clear answer, demonstrating the hypothesis-drive of his reasoning. Faith seems to form a strong basis for the rationality of Gaudapada.

### *Argument from Immortality of Soul (III. 19-22; IV. 7-10)*

This is an argument directed at those believers in rebirth who vouch for the immortality of the soul. It demonstrates that if the soul is immortal it cannot undergo mortality.

1. A thing can never change in its nature (as fire cannot change its heat).
2. The soul is immortal by nature.
3. Therefore, the soul can never become mortal, i.e., it can never pass into birth.

By the word 'nature' Gaudapada means 'that which is permanently acquired (*samsiddiki*), or is intrinsic (*svabhaviki*), instinctive (*sahaja*), non-produced (*akrita*), or unchanging in character (*svabhavam na jahati ya*).'<sup>258</sup> With this definition in view, he writes: "All souls are intrinsically (*svabhavatah*, by nature) free from old age and death."<sup>259</sup> Consequently, saying that a soul becomes mortal by birth is to say that the soul becomes the opposite of itself in nature by birth, which is a contradiction in terms, seeing that the soul was first called immortal by nature and nature was defined as that which is *permanently* acquired. Therefore, if the soul is immortal it cannot become mortal in anyway. Thus, those who believe in the immortality of soul cannot rationally also sustain the theory that the phenomenon of birth and death is true. Hence, phenomenal events cannot be true.

Thus, this argument is meant to demonstrate that the phenomenon of birth and its accompanying doctrine of rebirth are rationally inconsistent with the doctrine of the immortality of soul. With reference to the doctrine of rebirth and creation, Gaudapada says: 'Instruction about creation has been imparted by the wise for the sake of those who, from the facts of

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<sup>258</sup> IV. 9, *Ibid*, p. 162

<sup>259</sup> IV. 10, *Ibid*, p. 163



experience and adequate behaviour, vouch for the existence of substantiality, and who are ever afraid of the birthless entity.<sup>260</sup>

Contrary to the supposition that souls become mortal at birth, which forms the core of the doctrine that Gaudapada attacks, there is also the belief that the soul never becomes mortal at birth; rather it is embodied at birth and gives up the body at death. Thus, the birth or mortality of body doesn't affect the soul.<sup>261</sup> In that case, the phenomenon of birth and decay cannot be dismissed. However, this belief presently doesn't seem to be the concern of Gaudapada.

#### ***Argument from Coming to Being (IV. 4)***

1. A thing that already exists does not pass into birth (for it already is).
2. A thing that does not pre-exist cannot pass into birth (for something cannot come out of nothing).
3. Therefore, there is no birth.

This argument, similar to Parmenides' argument from coming-into-being, has in perspective not just the material universe but also being as consciousness and arrives at the conclusion by negation of two opposing views held by two different schools Indian philosophy, viz. the Sankhya and the Nyaya.

The Sankhya held that 'something cannot come out of nothing; and whatever is, has always been.'<sup>262</sup> Birth is the manifestation of what is already in a latent form. Objects do not come to be; they already are. The Nyaya, on the other hand, held to the doctrine of non-existent effect, which taught that the effect, once non-existent, comes into being afterwards. In other words, something comes out of nothing.<sup>263</sup>

Gaudapada negates both the views by stating that neither the pre-existent nor the non-existent can pass into birth. However, since birth of objects is perceived empirically, phenomenal experience must be false. Thus, both the Sankhya and Nyaya by opposing each other in their views prove that non-dualism is true.

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<sup>260</sup> IV. 41, *Ibid*, p. 192; the statement has overtones also of the permissiveness of myth for the common folk.

<sup>261</sup> *Srimad Bhagvad-Gita* II. 20-23 (tr. Swami Vireswarananda; Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), pp. 38, 39

<sup>262</sup> M. Hiriyanna, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 273

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, p. 239

*Argument from Disintegration (IV. 11)*

1. The only way the cause can take birth is by (at least partial) disintegration of itself.
2. But nothing that disintegrates can be eternal.
3. Therefore, if the cause disintegrates, then it cannot be eternal.
4. But the cause is eternal.
5. Therefore, it cannot disintegrate; i.e., it does not take birth.

This argument is based on the empirical notion that whatever disintegrates cannot be eternal. For instance, a jar that is disintegrable is not eternal. For it will soon be reduced to nothing by disintegration. Or it at least has the potential to disintegrate, which implies that it is not eternal necessarily, or in the absolute sense. Therefore, if the cause were to be eternal it must not disintegrate. Thus, the doctrine of birth is nullified.

Together with the argument from coming to being, this argument is a strong case for non-dualism. If something cannot come out of nothing, then something must be eternal. If this something is eternal then the phenomenal world is unreal; for eternality evinces birthlessness and non-disintegration. Since the cause must be eternal, therefore the phenomenal world is unreal.

However, the argument loses if it is proven that this eternal cause can create a contingent world out of nothing. But this is rationally difficult since reason lacks any synthetic (empirically demonstrable) way by which it can be proven that something can be created by someone out of nothing. The only cases where such creation out of thin air is seen are in magic or the conjurer's trick. But the result of such creation is illusory and unreal and proof of the doctrine of non-dualism which states that phenomenon is illusory or unreal.

Following are several arguments against the cause-effect theory:

*Argument from Sequential Consistency (IV. 15)*

1. By analogy, the effect is produced by the cause, even as a son is born of a father.
2. The father cannot be born of the son.
3. Likewise, therefore, the cause cannot be produced from the effect.

This is an argument from analogy against the Sankhya theory of effect within the cause and cause within the effect. It may be argued that the

analogy is falsely drawn since it can also be seen that a tree produces the seed and the seed produces a tree. However, the analogy of the seed is begging the question since it stands in par with the analogy of the son (IV. 20). In the case of the seed, the seed produces a tree different from the tree that produced it. In the words of Shankara, “a series does not constitute a single substance.”<sup>264</sup> In the same manner the son may produce another son who may become father of another son, but he cannot produce his own father. Likewise, then how can the phenomenal world with the many selves be considered to produce the same cause that produced it, namely *prakriti*?

Answering this analogy is that of the clay jar, which emerges out of clay and, on dissolution (destruction), becomes clay again,<sup>265</sup> the material cause remaining the same throughout. The answer to this analogy is given below.

1. Every causal relation has a sequence (wherein the cause precedes the effect).
2. The Sankhya cause and effect are devoid of a sequence.
3. Therefore, the Sankhya cause and effect have no causal relation, which is to say that the cause does not produce the effect.

The argument is a *reductio ad absurdum* wherein it is proved that if cause and effect are co-existent then, it is wrong to state that the cause produces the effect. With reference to the analogy of the clay jar, if the clay and the jar are co-existent, the clay cannot be considered to have produced the jar, since the jar is already there and need not be produced. Thus, the eternality of the cause establishes the impossibility of any further effect, as argued earlier, since the cause as eternal cannot its unlike effect, as the phenomenal world appears to be, nor can it itself undergo disintegration by producing out of itself something, nor can it be said to come into being itself since it already exists. This is capsulated in the following verse:

A thing, whatsoever it may be, is born neither of itself, nor of something else, (nor of both together). Nothing whatsoever is born that (already) exists, does not exist, or both exists and does not exist.<sup>266</sup>

That is to say that if a thing is said to already exist, it comes into being again either of itself or of something else or of both, since it already exists.

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<sup>264</sup> *Mandukya Upanishad*, p. 184

<sup>265</sup> M. Hiriyanna, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 278

<sup>266</sup> Karika IV. 22, *Mandukya Upanishad*, p. 173

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Thus, if it exists it cannot come into being; if it does not exist it cannot come into being (for it cannot produce itself neither can something come out of nothing), and if it said to both exist and not exist it cannot come into being. Thus, if the cause is already in existence, then it alone remains and no further effect like or unlike itself is possible. Consequently, the phenomenal world as a transitory effect cannot be true.

Having established the falsity of the phenomenal world and its objects, Gaudapada goes on to admit that external objects as they appear do exist from the standpoint of experience, say of color, pain, etc (IV. 24); however, this perception of external objects is relative to the present experience only. From the standpoint of ultimate reality, no external objects as cause of perception exist (IV. 25). As Shankara explains, on account of finding the external object to be unreal, it is not admitted to be the cause of knowledge, just as a snake seen on a rope is not. Besides, Shankara says, the cause is not a cause, since it is the content of an erroneous perception; and as such, it ceases to be so when the error is removed. Thus, the phenomenal world does not exist in the absolute sense. Accordingly, no external objects exist.

However, it may be said that this assumes the world as the only reality. This argument itself proceeds from the assumption that all Being is one. It then, logically follows that this Being is either self-caused, caused, or uncaused. It is impossible for it to be self-caused (born of itself) or caused (born of something else). But if Being is not caused then, it alone is eternal and devoid of all motions. Thus, phenomena as the panorama of cause and effect must be false.

Proceeding from this conclusion the argument goes on.

### *Argument from Perception and Being (IV. 26-28)*

1. If external objects do not exist then consciousness has no contact with them.
2. External objects do not exist.
3. Therefore, consciousness has no contact with them.
4. However, if consciousness exists it should be eternal (for as already seen if it once was not, it cannot come to be).
5. Consciousness exists.
6. Therefore, it is eternal (has no birth).
7. Consequently, consciousness is eternal and external objects perceived by it do not come into being as they appear to be so.

However, if it is contended that the transitory phenomenal world does exist, then the following arguments are in answer.

***Argument from Eternality (IV. 30)***

1. If something is beginningless then it is also endless.
2. The phenomenal world is said to be beginningless.
3. Therefore, it is also endless.

This implicitly would mean that the world has no possibility of emancipation from the problem of pain for ever. However if the phenomenal world had a beginning then it cannot have eternal emancipation as the following argument shows:

***Argument from Beginning***

1. If anything has a beginning then it has an end.
2. Liberation has a beginning.
3. Therefore liberation has an end, that is to say it is not eternal.

However, since it has been proved that the phenomenal world has no reality apart from the present waking state similar to the dream state, the phenomenal world which only is in the middle and neither in the beginning and the end of the waking state is unreal (IV. 31). The phenomenal world is called real only in the same way that an elephant conjured up by magic is called real by depending on perception and adequate behaviour. However, the magician's elephant does not exist, so neither does the phenomenal world exist.

On the final analysis, everything can be doubted but consciousness cannot be doubted. And if consciousness exists, it must be eternal; for it cannot come into existence either by itself or by something else. Further on, since the soul is birthless, reincarnation and birth is false. External objects share in similarity with internal objects of dream and therefore do not exist; thus, the phenomenal world is unreal from the standpoint of ultimate reality even as the dream world is unreal from the standpoint of phenomenal reality. If the phenomenal world were true then, there could be nothing eternal and cessation of the world would have occurred already as is written: "It is beyond question that the phenomenal world (*prapancah*) would cease to be if it had any existence..." (I. 18). Obviously, since temporality and transitoriness is characteristic of the world in which birth and death of things is the only empirical fact. As such, then, there could be nothing eternal. But perhaps it may be said that phenomenal reality is

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created by a transcendent absolute reality in the sense that both are equally real.

But phenomenal reality cannot be causally related to absolute reality: If the cause is birthless then the effect must be birthless which is contradictory; if cause and effect are simultaneous then causal relation does not exist meaning the cause did not cause the effect, which is contradictory; if the effect and cause are mutually causative then, the father-son contradiction results. Thus, phenomenal reality cannot be the product of an uncaused cause. If it is not the product of creation then, of course, implicitly, all change, motion, and birth lacks an ultimate causal relation. Therefore, the phenomenal world has no real existence. Thus, from the absolute standpoint, only Consciousness or the Self is Reality.

Everything seems to be born because of the empirical outlook; therefore there is nothing that is eternal. From the standpoint of Reality, everything is the birthless Self; therefore there is no such thing as annihilation.<sup>267</sup>

Thus, only “Consciousness – birthless, motionless and non-material, as well as tranquil and non-dual”<sup>268</sup> exists. In the final analysis, by the way, both birth and birthlessness are categories that cannot be applied to Ultimate Reality (IV. 60, 74). However, if consciousness is non-dual, and phenomenal reality is unreal, then what accounts for the experience of duality or plurality in the world? To this the following explanation is given:

### *Analogy of the Firebrand*

1. As the firebrand appears to be straight or crooked when in movement, so does Consciousness<sup>269</sup> appear to be the knower and the known when in vibration (IV. 47).
2. As the firebrand, when not in motion, becomes free from appearances and birth, so Consciousness, when not in vibration, will be free from appearances and birth (IV. 48).
3. The appearances of the firebrand in motion are not externally caused. Neither do they come from anywhere else nor do they go anywhere else from it (since appearances are not things and so lack substantiality); likewise, when Consciousness is in vibration, the appearances do not come to It from anywhere else, nor do

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<sup>267</sup> Karika IV. 57, *Mandukya Upanisad*, p. 204

<sup>268</sup> Karika IV. 45, *Mandukya Upanisad*, p. 195

<sup>269</sup> The word ‘Consciousness’ with capital ‘C’ here refers to Brahman, the Absolute Reality.

they go anywhere else from It when It is at rest. Appearances lack substantiality and therefore are unreal (IV. 49-52).

4. In this way the external entities (appearances) are not the products of Consciousness; neither is Consciousness a product of external entities. Thus, the knowers confirm the non-existence of cause and effect (IV. 54). Consciousness is, thus, objectless and eternally without relations (IV. 72).
5. As in dream Consciousness vibrates as though having dual functions, so in the waking state Consciousness vibrates as though with two facets as subject and object (IV. 61, 62).

The firebrand, thus, in its vibrant condition illustrates how qualitative, quantitative, and relational appearances occur when Consciousness is in motion. However, the illustration does not answer as to what accounts for Consciousness to be in motion, to which the following answer is given:

### ***The Hypothesis of Maya***

Even as objects appear to be real by magic, so do objects appear to be real through *Maya* (IV. 58, 59).

1. In the same manner that magic is not an object that exists; Maya also is not an object that exists (IV. 58, 59).
2. As a creature conjured up by magic (Yatha mayamayo jeevo) undergoes birth and death, so also do all creatures appear and disappear (IV. 69).
3. The birthless Self becomes differentiated verily through Maya, and it does so in no other way than this. For should It become multiple in reality, the immortal will undergo mortality (III. 19). That is, the contradiction of “immortal is mortal” ( $A \neq A$ ) occurs.
4. The imagination that a plurality of objects exists is the Maya (delusion) of the Self by which it itself is deluded (II. 19).
5. Maya is not a reality in the sense that it exists separately of Brahman, but is only descriptive of the condition of self-delusion that Brahman experiences (IV. 58). If Maya were existent then non-duality would be false since the second is already imagined. If it were non-existent then the experience of duality could not be explained. Consequently, neither existence nor non-existence can be predicated of it. Attempts to call it as existent produces the error similar to calling delusion as a power that exists in the condition “the man is deluded.” Accordingly, the phrase “by the power of Its own Maya” (II. 12) may be re-phrased as “by self-delusion”.

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Thus, vibration of Consciousness gives rise to the experience of diversity, which is *Maya* or delusion. In other words, the whole condition of vibration and phenomenal experience is *Maya*. The implications are clear: if the Self or Brahman can be self-deluded then It cannot be perfect. As O. N. Krishnan says, “If He is subject to delusion, then He cannot be considered omniscient and omnipotent.”<sup>270</sup> However, omniscience and omnipotence are attributes that are inapplicable to the non-dual Self. Therefore, it is wrong to talk of the Self as lacking or possessing any such attributes. As Shankara puts it:

...the Self, in Its own reality, is not an object of any other means of knowledge; for the Self is free from all adventitious attributes. Nor...does It belong to any class; because, by virtue of Its being one without a second, It is free from generic and specific attributes.... It is devoid of all action. Nor is It possessed of qualities like blueness etc., It being free from qualities. Therefore It baffles all verbal description.<sup>271</sup>

Another point which O. N. Krishnan makes against the *Maya* theory is that since Brahman by being deluded is the source of all evil in the world, while at the same time the law of *Karma* operates to administer justice in the world, how can it be logically conceived that the same deluded Brahman is the source of evils and injustices and at the same time dispenser of justice?<sup>272</sup> To which it may be replied that both *Karma* and rebirth are unreal from the standpoint of Ultimate Reality. In other words, they appear to be so only by *Maya*; as Gaudapada says: “Birth of a thing that (already) exists can reasonably be possible only through *Maya* and not in reality.”<sup>273</sup> Ultimately, if all is non-dual, what is that causes evil to what and what is that judges what? Further, being free of relational attributes such as “justice,” “goodness,” etc. do not apply to Brahman.

The process of *Maya* is described by the Karika as follows:<sup>274</sup>

1. First the Lord (Brahman) imagines the individual (soul).
2. Then He imagines the different objects, external and mental.
3. The individual gets his memory in accordance with the kind of thought-impressions he has.
4. The Self is, consequently, imagined to be the many.

<sup>270</sup> O. N. Krishnan, *In Search of Reality*, p. 343

<sup>271</sup> *Mandukya Upanisad*, p. 32

<sup>272</sup> O. N. Krishnan, *In Search of Reality*, p. 343

<sup>273</sup> III. 27, *Mandukya Upanisad*, p. 134

<sup>274</sup> II. 16-19, *Mandukya Upanisad*, pp. 74-77



5. This is the Maya of that self-effulgent One, by which He Himself is deluded.

Regarding the relation of the individual souls with the Absolute Brahman, the following explanation drawn from an analogy of jars and space is given:

***The Analogy of Jars and Space (III. 3-8)***

1. Just as space confined within the jars etc. merge completely on the disintegration of the jars etc., so do the individual souls merge here in the Self (III. 4).
2. Just as all the spaces confined within the various jars are not darkened when one of the spaces thus confined becomes contaminated by dust, smoke, etc., so also is the case with all the individuals in the matter of being affected by happiness etc. (III. 6).
3. As the space within a jar is neither a transformation nor a part of space (as such), so an individual being is never a transformation nor a part of the supreme Self (III. 7).
4. Just as the sky becomes blackened by dust etc. to the ignorant, so also the Self becomes tarnished by impurities to the unwise (III. 8).
5. The aggregates (of bodies and senses) are all projected like dream by the Maya of the Self (atma-maya-visarjitah, i.e., Self's deluded-projection). Be it a question of superiority or equality of all, there is no logical ground to prove their existence (III. 10).

In accordance with (3) above, it is erroneous to suppose that an individual being is a transformation of the Self. For if that was true, then when an individual realized Brahman, cosmic liberation would have simultaneously occurred. Similarly, it is erroneous to suppose that the individual is a part of the Brahman, as if Brahman were a divisible whole. For if Brahman were divisible, then in accordance to the argument from disintegration it would not be eternal. However, if it were not eternal, then it could not be, in accordance to the argument from coming-into-being. Thus, Brahman is the eternal, unchanging, formless, partless, birthless, sleepless, dreamless, tranquil and fearless, non-dual Self (III. 36, 37).

## Critique of Non-Dualism and the Theory of Maya

The rational mirror has been clean over *advaita*. Consequently, the five characteristics of rationality, *viz.* unity, necessity, immutability, transcendence, and strict universality are readily reflected in the concept of Brahman. Brahman is non-dual (unity), Real (necessity), unchangeable and birthless (immutability), non-phenomenal (transcendence), and all-pervasive<sup>275</sup> (strict universality).

Obviously, the non-dualistic enterprise, though thoroughly rational, is not freed from a *kind of fideism*. This is so in the sense that the non-dualistic enterprise itself begins from the hypothesis that all reality is one, Being is one. Logically, then, when the cosmological argument is applied to it, this Being turns out to be the uncaused one. The argument from necessity and contingency necessitates Being to be necessary. Similarly, other arguments prove that this Being is immutable, undividable, and infinite. Thus, the hypothesis that all Being is one facilitates reason towards this conclusion of non-dualism. However, it is also inevitable that reason assumes this worldly reality to be the only reality and, thus all being to be one. On what basis, could it assume some other kind of existence to which these rational attributes could be applied? Experience, of course, doesn't provide it with any such ideas. And, apart from Revelation, reason is certainly driven upon this hypothesis, *viz.*, that this worldly reality is all reality available for analysis, towards non-dualism. But immediately the problem to explain away phenomenal reality, the plural and dynamic one, as false emerges and non-dualists come up with the hypothesis of *Maya* to ward off this problem.

However, the theory of *Maya* does bear some difficulties. If *Maya* is nothing other than the deluded condition of the Self then, as to how Consciousness gets vibrant is not explained. If *Maya* is intrinsic to the nature of the Self, then the Self cannot be attributeless; further, since delusive power is intrinsic to It, truth can never be a sure possibility. Besides, since the individuals are neither transformations nor parts of the Self, the Self is untouched by what happens to the individuals, which are but dream-like from the absolute standpoint. Then, how can it be said that the delusion occurs to the Self if bondage or liberation of the individual does not affect It in anyway?

Moreover, the vibration of *Maya* theory does not make it clear how and why self-delusion results in plurality of appearances. Dream objects though unreal have similarity with objects of the waking state, thus admittedly arisen from the experience of the waking state (IV. 37). But objects of the waking state cannot be so related to the other states of

<sup>275</sup> Karika I. 10, *Mandukya Upanisad*, p. 40

consciousness. For in both *Prajna* and *Turiya* these objects cease to be. In the analogy of the rope and snake, wherein the rope is falsely perceived as a snake in the dark, past experience with snake may account for the illusion; however, in the experience of plurality how can non-duality account for the same?

Furthermore, the Karika's assertion that *Maya* has no reality (IV.58) does pose problem. For if *Maya* has no reality then how can it have a delusive influence over the Self? But then, on the other hand, non-dualism does have a problem in its opposite, for if *Maya* did have any reality then, non-dualism would cease in face of the dualism of Self and *Maya*. To avoid this contradiction, *Maya* is said to be non-existing,<sup>276</sup> which only means that it does not exist. In that case, the rational conclusion must be that it, as being nothing, can affect nothing on the Self. It cannot even be said that 'self-delusion' is non-existent and still mean that *Maya* is operative. Obviously, reason has come to a standpoint, even in *Advaita* philosophy where it fails to reconcile reason and experience. Thus, the question of what accounts for phenomenal experience is not satisfactorily answered. And so, it may be said that though the rationalist attempt had been successful in deducing the non-duality, transcendence, immutability, necessity, and infinity of the Absolute, it has not been successful in providing a theory that accounts for the experience of plurality in the universe. Thus, the rationalist attempt fails to harmonize itself with experience.

In both the Grecian and the *advaitin* search, it has been observed that the resultant theology has been a reflection of the characteristics of reason. The culmination of the rational search has been monism or non-dualism. The result was inevitable from the deductions reached in the reasoning process. Proceeding from certain assumptions and having arrived at certain conclusions by reasoning, the derivation of a monistic outlook was only a necessary outcome. The most important of the findings in the rational path to monism were:

1. The logical impossibility of something coming out of nothing. Lacking any empirical concept of something coming out of nothing, it only becomes inevitable to assume that something cannot come out of nothing. Further, something coming out of nothing in the sense of self-generation is logically absurd.
2. The logical impossibility of change, either in relation to space or time. Consequently, motion, birth, and transformation are absurd.

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<sup>276</sup> Karika IV. 58, *Mandukya Upanisad*, p. 205

## Epistemics of Divine Reality

3. Uncertainty of phenomenal reality from analysis of the states of consciousness.
4. Infinite conceptual divisibility leads to the paradoxical deduction that objects are essentially both finite and infinite. From our point of view, they appear finite but by virtue of being infinitely divisible, they are infinite within themselves.
5. The phenomenon of disintegration is not in keeping with the rational necessity of the universe being eternal (since it cannot come out of nothing). If it is eternal, then it cannot disintegrate. Thus, the phenomenal world cannot be true.

In the final analysis, it is necessity, eternality, and immutability necessitated of reality and the conviction that all being is one and indivisible that leads to the conclusion that reality is non-dual and contiguous (universal).

The next section in this chapter studies the epistemological theory of Immanuel Kant (A.D. 1724-1804) in order to analyze his thought regarding the epistemic difficulties and problems involved in any attempt to unravel the mystery of Ultimate Reality.

### Kantian Epistemics and Divine Reality

Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) theory of knowledge is often referred to as the Copernican revolution in knowledge. According to Kant himself, as Copernicus hypothesized that the earth revolved around the sun rather than the sun revolving around the earth in order to solve the discrepancies in astronomy, it is also proper to hypothesize that objects conform to the faculty of intuition rather than the faculty of intuition conforming to the objects.<sup>277</sup> Though Kant insists that all knowledge begins with experience, he must be regarded as a rationalist and not an empiricist since he claims the mind to be actively involved in the production of ideas based on some innate ideas it already has in possession. The resultant knowledge of the world that one has is nothing but the product of the mind, which arbitrarily decides what the sensations must look like. Thus, knowledge is primarily rational (it resembles the mental structure).

Kant's *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) has two main divisions: the Transcendental Aesthetic, the Transcendental Logic. Transcendental Logic is further divided into Transcendental Analytic and Transcendental Dialectic. Both transcendental aesthetic and transcendental logic are the subjects of transcendental philosophy which Kant defines as the study of

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<sup>277</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Norman Kemp Smith; <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/cpr/toc.html>, 1985), p. 22